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CICERO'S HEXAMETERS

In the *Classical Journal* for April, 1918, a reviewer speaks of "Cicero's unhappy poetic efforts," and probably the greater number of his readers took no exception to this verdict pronounced upon the poetic effusions of Rome's great orator. But we must remember that even the scanty survivals of Cicero's verse are not fairly represented by the unlucky

fortunatam natam me consule Romam;

nor by the only less criticized

cedant arma togae, concedat laurea laudi (linguae?)

He was certainly not a poet, yet, like some other men who have gained a thorough command of the resources of their native tongues, he could write eminently respectable verse, judged by metrical standards; more than that, he exerted a distinct and favorable influence on the development of the dactylic hexameter in Latin.

The evil that men do lives after them,
The good is oft interred—

in the back numbers of some learned publication. What I have said of Cicero's verse would be obvious to anyone who had read the careful and sympathetic analysis of his hexameters, published by Professor Tracy Peck in *TAPA*, XXVIII, 60 ff. But since I have been unable to recover the reference which many years ago called my attention to Professor Peck's paper, I suspect that I might cull material from it to embellish this note without serious risk of being convicted of plagiarism. But I prefer to be honest and to do Cicero and the readers of the *Journal* the greater service of making that article better known.

We should probably all accept the verdict of Quintilian on the second of the two lines of Cicero which I have quoted and that of Juvenal on the first; but I should like to make one comment upon them which is original so far as my reading goes. Cicero's allusions and quotations show that he was well read in the poetry of Greece and of his native land, and that he had a good ear for rhythm and assonance seems to be beyond question. He therefore must have written these two lines deliberately, either because he believed with Ovid "decentiorem faciem esse, in qua aliquis naevos fuisset" (Sen. *Contr.* ii. 2. 12); or because, like some of the *poetae neoterici* of the present day, he aimed at arresting the attention of his reader, or hearer, by eccentricity of diction; in other words, at making him "sit up and take notice." That this ill-starred venture is probably largely responsible for the caustic comment of Tacitus (*Dial.* 21) as well as for concealing the orator's real contributions in the field of versification from many modern students of Cicero should be a warning to those who, either in prose or in verse, yield even occasionally to the temptation to write "ea quae mirentur potius homines quam intellegant" (Suet. *Aug.* lxxxvi. 2).

JOHN C. ROLFE

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA